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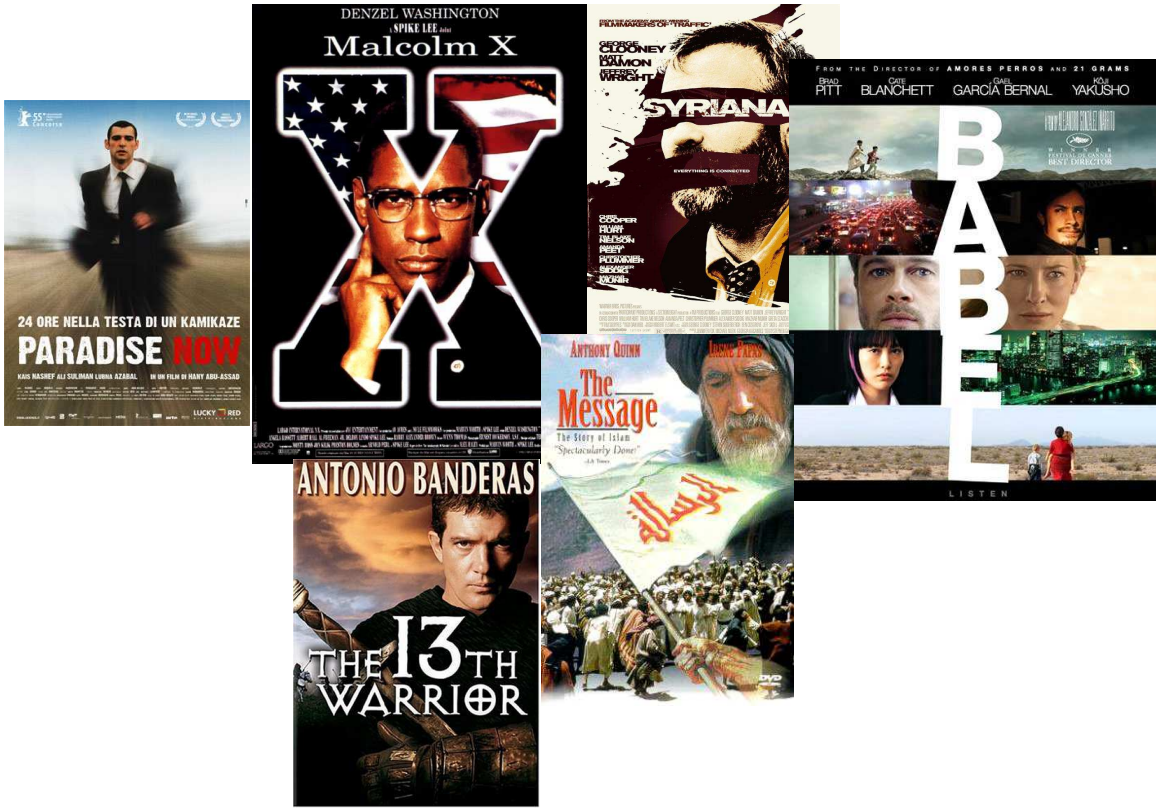
Muslim Cinema: An Introduction

Plus the Top 101 Muslim Theme Films



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The Muslim World and Cinema

Every culture promotes its history, beliefs, heroes, values, norms, and attitude. The African-American director Spike Lee said about his films, "I'm just trying to tell a good story and make thought-provoking, entertaining films. I just try and draw upon the great culture we have as a people, from music, novels, the streets." Is there a parallel to African-American, Asian, or Latin cinema, called "Muslim Cinema"? Does it exist, and if so, how can it be understood? Before one can understand the cinema of a people, a little more light needs to be shed on the actual people.

The Muslim world, with approximately one fifth of the world population and in turn its politics, economics, and culture, plays a very important role on the world stage. Headline news is the most popular venue promoting what is known about Muslims, so it becomes imperative for Muslims to be seen and heard from other vantage points. One of these vistas is art, and in the present world Cinema, due its mass appeal and significant availability. An introduction to Muslim Cinema allows Muslims to take a critical reflection about their own beliefs and culture, as well as providing a window for those who are of other faiths to see who Muslims are. Where does one start?

Some countries like the U.S., Japan, France and India have a strong arts culture, and an affinity or presence to the medium of film. The Muslim world does not easily fit in this category, so how else can it be viewed. Besides providing entertainment, film can present a window to the economic, social or moral challenges of society. There are volumes of books on world cinema, regional cinema (e.g. Arab Cinema), and national cinema of Muslim-majority countries that have a cinema and history like Egyptian or Turkish cinema. However, "Muslim Cinema" is not a known entity. This introduction to the subject is at best like the Indian story of a group of blind men feeling different parts of an elephant, trying to determine what an Elephant is like. Maybe this introduction is its tusk or tail, but it is a starting point for discourse.

The Muslim world, although perceived as one entity, is not monolithic. It is made up of different regions, countries, states and communities. And although religion is the basic underlying theme, each region comes with its own differentiating culture. There are over 1.4 Billion Muslims in the world represented in 48 Muslim majority countries from Morocco to Malaysia.

There are also a large minority of Muslims in many countries including the U.S., U.K. France, Germany, Russia, China, and India. Although "Muslim countries" have Muslim majority populations, they also represent people of other faiths. With so many Muslims spanning the globe, there are hundreds of cultures, languages and dialects. With such diversity, there is no easily definable commonality other than faith which can describe "Muslim Cinema." So what is Islamic or Muslim Cinema?

As these terms are not defined, the following are working definitions. "Islamic Cinema is film that conforms to Islamic laws, customs and values." It is a high ideal, and due to the vagaries of film it is a sensitive and difficult subject to address. Any art-form, by its very nature, is subjective. "Muslim Cinema is a film movement by or about Muslims." This paper focuses on the latter. It is a discourse on belief and culture, politics and perception. It is not meant to proselyte or promote religion. It provides a platform to provide social commentary and social criticism. In some areas, it ties into the global social justice movement and highlights common humanity, the universal language of freedom and love.

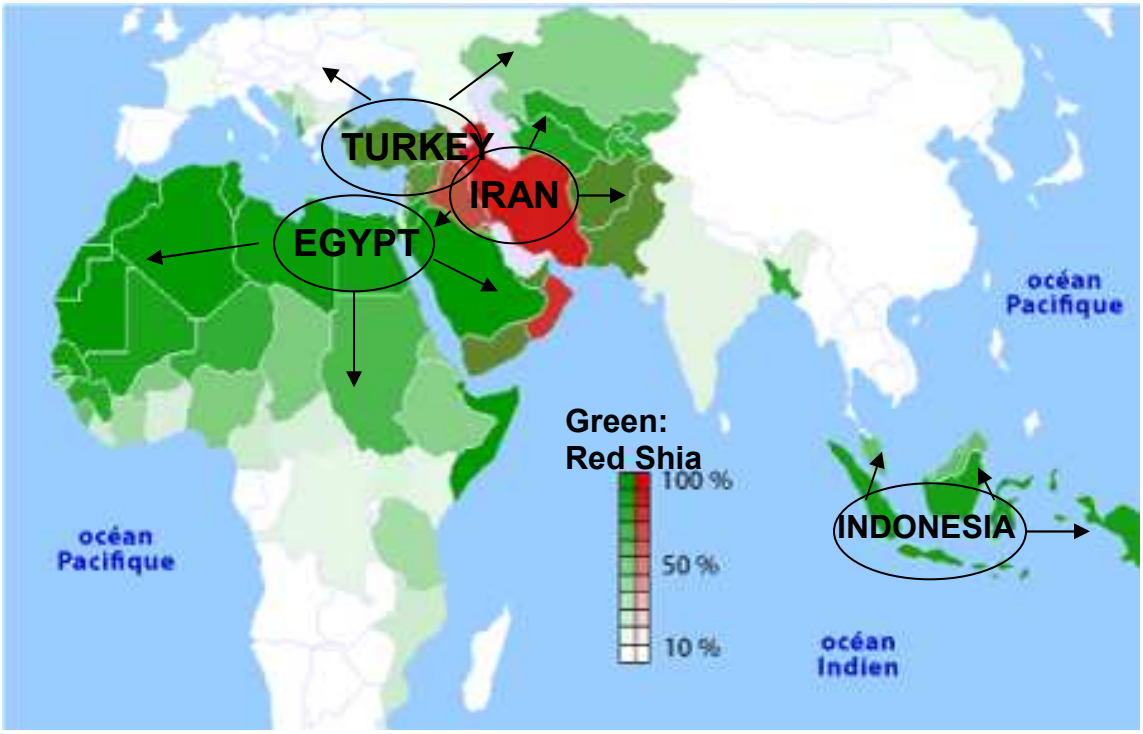
Muslim Cinema can be loosely broken down into two categories. The first is indigenous cinema of Muslim-majority countries like Iran, Egypt, and Turkey. The second is cinema of Muslim-minority countries like the U.S., France, and India. The films can be made by Muslims or people of other faiths. Most of the films discussed or listed have some representation of Muslims or issues faced by minorities which juxtapose to the Muslim.

Indigenous Cinema of Muslim-majority countries

There are 48 Muslim majority countries in the world. Due to religious, social and economic challenges, only a few have a history or presence in making films.

The most influential of these countries have been the tri-ad of Iran, Egypt, and Turkey. Each country has a different national language. For Iran it is Persian, Egypt has Arabic and Turkey has the Turkish language. Each country also has a distinct sphere of influence.

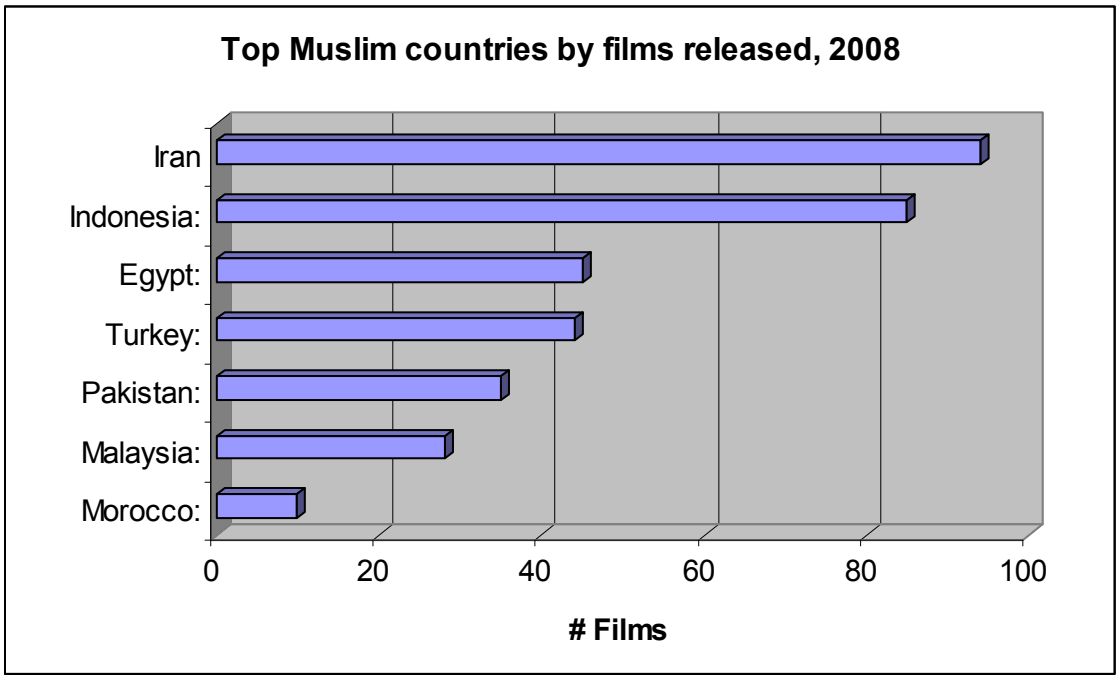
Spheres of Cinema Influence



Each cinema has had a beginning, a golden age, its decline and its present condition. Iran as a country with a cinema is well documented given the success of filmmakers like Abbas Kiarostami, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Majid Majidi. Indonesia is not as well known, but has a history in film making that stretches back to 1926 and peaked in the 1980s. Its influence has spread into neighboring countries like Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

Egypt, with its long history and its pre-eminent position, has played a critical role in the films that have influenced both African and Arab cultures. Turkey, similarly being a bridge between Asia and Europe as well as its Ottoman heritage influences many of the former Central Asian-Soviet states including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Iran, not only has a long history of cinema but their filmmakers have made a presence on the world stage from Cannes to Oscar nominations. Their influence overlaps that of Turkey and also impacts Iraq and Lebanon.

The following table lists countries with the most active cinema in terms of film production.



Other countries worth a mention are Pakistan, countries of the former Central Soviet states and sub-Saharan Africa. Pakistan had a good presence in film-making after partition from India. It too had a golden age in the sixties and seventies, before going into decline. There is a small revival of cinema going on, with the strongest presence of films like Khuda Kay Liye (In the name of God) which became a blockbuster film.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, some of the former Central Soviet states, notably Kazakhstan, have also come into the foray of filmmaking. Amongst many films which depict their culture and history was the Oscar nominated film "Mongol" for best foreign-language film in 2008.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal, Niger and Nigeria are some of the Muslim countries that have led the way in film-making. The director Sembene Ousmane is regarded as Africa's most notable film-maker, who has inspired many other African filmmakers.

Not all people have a national identity which is reflected in a national culture and cinema. A primary example are the Kurdish people who do not have a nation. Due to colonial rule of the middle east and its later sub-division the Kurdish people are split amongst Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and several other countries. Some films from the region are starting to address Kurdish people and their issues.

Besides film production, proper distribution plays a critical role in getting exposure to new releases. The Cairo International Film festival in Egypt, along with the Fajr International Film Festival in Iran, are the longest running festivals in the Muslim world. The International Festival of Muslim Cinema also called "Golden Minbar" held in Kazan, Tatarstan; the Dubai film festival; and the Kara film festival held in Karachi, Pakistan are some of the emerging festivals that are making a strong presence in the Muslim world. Besides these many of the other Muslim majority countries like Morocco and Kazakhstan have their own festivals. Festivals like these are not limited to representing Islam and Muslims to the world community but as the mission of Golden Minbar articulates, "representatives of other faiths creating films, popularizing universal spiritually-moral and cultural traditions."

Elements of Muslim Cinema
Imagery and Censorship in Islam

Every frame in film is an image and traditionally in Islam images of living beings have been shunned in favor of the abstract. Islamic art has, in spite of this limitation, flourished and made use of the abstract. This can be seen in architecture and other art forms. The photographic image however, has faced resistance in conservative circles. Based on both form and content, many conservative Muslims find that film opposes the beliefs and values of the Muslim faith. In several Muslim-majority countries, Movie theaters have been burnt to the ground when religious fervor has gotten out of control. But this represents only a small minority of the Muslim world. The rest enjoy cinema. Since the early twentieth century, the still photo along with moving images, have now become an accepted part of life. Being an audio-visual medium, film in many instances contains graphic content of nudity, sex, violence or language. Some may have music (sensual or not). Most Muslim countries attempt to control these images and messages in the form of censorship.

Censorship varies by country and its laws. However, there are some common themes that are censored and can be found in the Muslim world. These cover the areas of politics, religion and sex. Criticism of government and its policies is generally frowned upon. Many well known filmmakers have been detained in jail, or attacked by vigilante mobs for their film's message or content. Any attack on religion, whether it is against Islam or any other faith, is curtailed in Muslim Cinema. Because Muslims feel they are the "victims" of negative media portrayal in the West, there has been strong emotional responses in an attempt to counteract this victimization. Any representation of the Prophet Muhammad, his family, or companions in any form of imagery is forbidden. There are many reasons why images are forbidden and they go beyond the authors limited knowledge. A very basic reason is images can lead to idolatry, which Islam came to abolish. Traditional family is held as a core pillar of society, and anything that undermines this is also challenged. In addition to this, vulgar language and violence and anything else typically immoral according to Islamic teachings are typically censored. Most but not all of this type of censorship is not however unique to Muslim culture and cinema, it is highlighted for emphasis.

Women and gender

The Muslim film industry, as in most eastern and western cultures alike, has been dominated by men and has given primarily a male point of view. As a broad and generalizing statement, it has taken women in Muslim countries a long time to become spectators, then actors and now directors. Women's issues including the role of women in society, women's rights, widowhood, polygamy, male-female interaction in societies where segregation has been the norm and female sexuality have been in the background of themes in Muslim Cinema. Things are changing, especially in countries like Iran where Cinema and women are making a presence, and these issues are coming to the foreground. Gender issues, men-women interaction and other social issues are being explored. At the other end of the spectrum are countries like Saudi Arabia where Cinema halls have been banned for over three decades and where permitted, mainly allow male-only audiences. However, there too change is taking place, albeit at a slow pace. The objections to mixed screening are based upon religious, political and cultural reasoning's. In an interconnected world, women are coming to the forefront of not only politics but other facets of life, including cinema. Of all the Muslim countries, Iran stands out as the leader in women directors and making films related to gender issues. This trend is spreading in other countries including Turkey, Pakistan, and other nations.

World and Muslim Politics

Muslim cinema cannot be seen in a vacuum from local and global politics. Unlike the cinema of America, China or India, the Muslim world is not one political nation or union like the European Community. Most of the Muslim world has been colonized by the British, French and other colonial powers. The last Muslim Caliphate, the Ottoman empire ended in the early twentieth century, and with its breakup the Western powers carved up large parts of Muslim lands into nation states. Today although with the exception of Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya, all the Muslim countries have some form of independence. Some would argue that most of them are still ruled through neo-colonialism. Regardless of this fact, faith is the largest common denominator that ties them together. However, there are other divides that come into play including the Sunni versus Shia branches of Islam. Even where language is common, e.g. Arabic, what separates people are the numerous Arabic dialects. Given both the history and the present political condition of Muslim countries, cinema has either flourished in a few counties or not evolved to its full potential. Cinema requires both

intellectual and financial capital to make its mark. It requires freedom of thought and expression, which is sadly lacking in many of these lands. It also needs public and private support to help cultivate the cinema. Without an infrastructure that helps facilitate not only production of film but provides channels of distribution, Muslim cinema may not thrive to it's potential.

Cinema of Muslim-minority countries

i) Hollywood and its representation of Muslims

By its very nature, cinema reflects and amplifies interesting parts of life through drama and conflict. The narratives that make it to celluloid have their heroes and villains. In Hollywood the villains have varied over time. In the Westerns they were native Indians. In war films they were the Germans and Japanese. Generally, Muslims were absent in the early days of Hollywood. There were the occasional Arab and Muslim villains but a Muslim hero was unheard of. This may be due in part to the history of past conflicts going back to the Crusades.

Since the early 1920s, the role of the Arab-Muslim in films like Rudolph Valentino's *The Sheik* and *A Son of the Sahara* set a precedent of negative depiction, of a people who were dangerous and not to be trusted. Fast forward to the seventies, eighties and the oil crisis where for a short time Muslims were portrayed as greedy billionaires.

In the eighties and nineties films like *Not without my daughter* whose subject of Muslim Drama, Kidnapping, True Story and Betrayal, were the key ways Muslims were identified. The tagline of the film "In 1984, Betty Mahmoody's husband took his wife and daughter to meet his family in Iran. He swore they would be safe. They would be free to leave. He lied," were common. This film was used for diversity training and understanding of Muslim culture for many years.

However, the predominant stereotype has been that of bombers. In *Black Sunday* an Arab terrorist plots to bomb a stadium during the Super Bowl. These were followed by a spate of films where the antagonists are Muslims, including *Executive Decision, True Lies* and *Rules of Engagement*. With all of them the basic premise is that the Muslims are out to destroy our Western (American) society and it's OK to stop them even if it involves collateral damage.

In some examples where a story has no direct bearing on Muslims, plots have included them as the "fall guys". Examples being *Back to the Future* where Libyan terrorists show up out of nowhere. *Father of the Bride II*, a rich Arab and his Harem show up to buy the prized home of Steve Martin, only to tear it up. All these examples built of stereotypes that have been used to project Muslims and the danger of that is described by Jack Shaheen, author of "Reel Bad Arabs".

"If you take the same images and you repeat them over and over again, and the images teach us to hate a people and to hate their religion, what happens is that we, in spite of our intelligence, our innate goodness, actually turn around and let these images despise and vilify an entire people. (2001)"

However, it is not all bad news. One of the first positive portrayals of Muslims in film was made by the director Moustapha Akkad, who made two Epic films. The first, *The Message* about the life of the Prophet Muhammad and the second, *Lion of the Desert* about a Libyan tribal leader Omar Mukhtar who fought the Italian army around World War II.

There are positive changes taking place in Hollywood. In *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves*, Azeem played by Morgan Freeman is a Muslim who helps Robin Hood fight the evil doers, eventually saving his life. In *The 13th Warrior*, Antonio Banderas plays a courageous Arab traveler, who helps a group of Scandinavian adventurers in a battle with a tribe of cannibalistic raiders. In *Kingdom of Heaven*, Saladin (and the Muslims) is shown as a thoughtful, compassionate, respectful, brave and human leader. Although Hollywood has not done an about turn, these examples are of positive change taking place. In the French film *Days of Glory* Arab-Muslim soldiers fight for France and the Allies during World War II. Both the director and main cast were Muslim.

ii) Bollywood and its representation of Muslims

In Bollywood the story about Muslims is a little different. Muslims have had a small presence in Hindi film since the early days of Cinema.

There have been many Muslim Bollywood heroines from Madhubala, considered to be one of the most beautiful actresses to grace the Indian silver screen. She starred in many films, including one of the greatest Indian Epic films *Mughal-e-Azam*, which can be compared to *Gone with the Wind*. Other actresses include Nargis, Waheeda

Rahman, and Zeenat Aman. On the male actors side, Dilip Kumar, real name (Yusuf Khan) was a major star in the early days of cinema. Some of the top lead male stars of the nineties and beyond are the Khans, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan and Shah-Rukh Khan. Although the presence of Muslims in Bollywood sounds positive, it is not all good news.

Although Muslims have had an on and off-screen presence in Hindi cinema, most of the narrative has avoided the Muslims or relegated them to the sidelines. There is a strong theme of Indian and Hindu nationalism in films. The role of minorities, not just Muslims, but Christians and Sikhs as well, has largely been stereotyped. Bollywood is secular but it still has its dominant Hindu religious motifs in almost all films. These show up in the presence of worship, marriage and death. Muslim character portrayal of men has been either timid or violent. In the case of women, the typical portrayal is that of someone who is promiscuous.

Indian cinema's coverage of Muslims can be broken down by a timeline. There have been three periods and trends in Indian Cinema which reflect the portrayal of Muslims. These are best described by Kalyani Chadha and Anandam P. Kavoori in their essay on "The Muslim Other in Indian Cinema" in the book Global Bollywood. They describe three time periods. The 50's and 60's was the *exoticized* period where Muslims are portrayed from the Moghul period as Kings and nobility. A world which is far removed from the present day Muslims in India. Mughal-e-Azam is an example of a film of that period. The second period is the 70s and 80s where the Muslim role is *marginalized* into supporting roles of the protagonist Hindus. These Muslim roles were the stereotypical tailor, preacher, Qawali singer and in the case of women the promiscuous courtesan. From the 90s to the present, the majority of roles and depictions of Muslims was that of the *demonized other*. For example, the story of India's partition into Pakistan in the film *Gadar* was reduced to romance between a Sikh man and a Muslim woman and Rambo like rage as he goes to rescue her from her evil Pakistani parents. A significant number of other films show Muslims as criminals, crooks, and every day people who cannot be trusted.

However, just as in Hollywood, there are positive changes taking place in Hindi Cinema too. Although typically films do not have the protagonist as a Muslim, sometimes the anti-hero reflects a Muslim point of view in films like *Dil Se* and *Kurbaan*. *My Name is Khan* is one of the new wave of films by director Karan Johar and legendary actor Shah-Rukh Khan, a Muslim, where the latter portrays for the first time

a role of a Muslim. It will take time before more films of this caliber make it to the mainstream, as they cause political turmoil with the far-right political parties.

The Next Chapter

If this were a book, there would be a chapter on the cinema of each Muslim country or a chapter on each of the major themes that appear from the Muslim world. There could be analysis of films that define Muslim Cinema, and interviews with writers and directors who help shape Muslim Cinema. Instead, the reader is referred to the excellent books that will provide some of this information and insights. A few books are worth a special mention.

Contemporary world cinema : Europe, the Middle East, East Asia and South Asia by Shohini Chaudhuri and *Asian cinema : a field guide* by Tom Vick provide a very good overview of World and Asian cinema respectively. Many of the Muslim countries' cinema, especially that of Iran, Turkey and Egypt, are included.

Arab cinema : history and cultural identity by Viola Shafik and *The Cinema in the Arab countries* by George Sadoul, provide an excellent overview about Arab Cinema. This includes its history, censorship, relationship to images, music and culture.

Women, Islam and cinema and *Turkish cinema : identity, distance and belonging* both by Gönül Dönmez-Colin, are wonderful resources on the subject of women in Muslim cinema and the latter on Turkish cinema.

Ousmane Sembene Interviews edited by Annett Busch and Max Annas provides insights of a master film maker known as the father of African Cinema.

MyFavoriteReview.com's Top 101 Muslim theme films.

Selection Criteria

In a sea of films produced since the last century, how does one select a film that makes it to the top *101 Muslim theme films*? It is not an easy proposition. The finalist films were rated on narrative, direction/editing, the positive message or reflection on Muslim culture, and finally the uniqueness of the way the filmmaker has carried that message.

The following is a disclaimer. Reviews and lists by their nature are subjective. Ratings and numbers even though apparently having a scientific feel to them are still based on the reviewers' assessment. No list is perfect, in inclusion or ranking including this one.

A few words on ratings and inclusion. The Motion Picture Association of America rates films G, PG, PG13 and R. These ratings, although a guideline, are still very subjective. MyFavoriteReview avoids reviewing films that are graphic only in nature. The number of good films with a Muslim theme is relatively small compared to the total number of films produced. This is the first attempt to compile such a list. Some of the films included in the list may contain some scenes that are graphic, but the overall message of the film is so strong, they are included. It is up to each individual, in addition to checking the review, to check ratings and screen the film before showing to audiences and or younger children.

	101 Must See Muslim theme films	Description
101	A Mighty Heart	Mariane Pearl embarks on a frantic search to locate her journalist husband, Daniel, when he goes missing in Pakistan.
100	Al-massir (Destiny) (1997)	Set in 12th century Arab-ruled Spanish province Andalusia, famed philosopher Averroes is appointed grand judge by the caliph and his liberal court judgments are not liked by everyone.
99	A New Day in Old Sana'a	A photographer, Tariq, must choose between his love or an arranged marriage
98	A Time for Drunken Horses	After their father dies, a family of five are forced to survive on their own in a Kurdish village on the border of Iran and Iraq.
97	Jenin Jenin (doc)	Documentary about the Battle for Jenin refugee camp
96	Man Push Cart	A night in the life of a former Pakistani rock star who now sells coffee from his push cart on the streets of Manhattan.
95	Noorie	A simple and touching story about Noorie, a girl from the valleys with a simple dream: a house, family and life filled with love - and who is forced to defend this dream at the cost of her life...
94	Occupation 101 (doc)	A thought-provoking and powerful documentary film on the current and historical root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and U.S. political involvement.
93	Persepolis	A French animated film about a girl who comes of age in Iran during the Islamic revolution and how she sees it once she moves to Europe.
92	Prince Among Slaves	The True Story of an African Prince who Survived Slavery in America.
91	Rana's Wedding	A Palestinian girl of 17 wants to get married to the man of her own choosing.
90	Sorry, Haters	Against the anxieties and fears of post-9/11 America, an Arab cab driver picks up a troubled professional woman (Robin Wright Penn) with unexpected results.
89	The Band's visit	A comedy about a band comprised of members of the Egyptian police force head to Israel to play at the inaugural ceremony of an Arab arts center, are lost and welcomed instead in an Israeli town.
88	The Kingdom	A team of U.S. government agents is sent to investigate the bombing of an American facility in the Middle East.
87	The Road to Guantanamo	A docu-drama about a trio of British Muslims who were held in Guantanamo Bay for two years until they were released without charge.
86	Three Kings	In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, 4 soldiers set out to steal gold that was stolen from Kuwait, but they discover people who desperately need their help.

85	Al Otro Lado	This drama features three stories about the bonds between children and absent parents. One of the parents is a migrant from North Africa.
84	Ali	A biography of sports legend, Muhammad Ali, from his early days to his days in the ring.
83	Arranged	A Jewish and Muslim woman become friends in a Brooklyn school
82	Brick Lane	A young Bangladeshi woman, Nazneem, arrives in 1980s London, leaving behind her beloved sister and home, for an arranged marriage and a new life.
81	Cape of Good Hope	A Drama revolving around 3 women's lives and how they are intertwined.
80	Daughter of Keltoum	A woman travels to a Berber settlement in Algeria-- to find her biological mother and in the process finds a world untouched by contemporary society.
79	Dev	A story about love and hate as Muslim militancy and the police in India collide.
78	Gallipoli	Two Australian sprinters face the brutal realities of war when they are sent to fight in the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey during World War I.
77	Girdap" (Whirlpool)	A naive apolitical young man, who is interrupted by a fundamental religious environment, turns bitter against society. The film follows his journey.
76	Inch'Allah Dimanche	The story of an immigrant woman struggling against old world traditions.
75	Journey of Hope	The story of a poor Turkish family who tries to emigrate illegally to Switzerland.
74	Kite Runner	After spending years in California, Amir returns to his homeland in Afghanistan to help his old friend Hassan, whose son is in trouble.
73	Maryam	An Iranian-born teenager living in suburban New Jersey thinks of herself as simply an American until anti-Iranian sentiment erupts in her community after American hostages are held in Iran.
72	Partition	A former Sikh soldier comes to the rescue of a traumatized Muslim girl, marries her but then has to rescue her from Pakistan.
71	Rambo III	Rambo's Vietnam commanding officer Colonel Trautman is held hostage in Afghanistan, and its up to Rambo to rescue him.
70	Silent waters	A former Hindu, now Muslim widow in a village in Pakistan sees her 17 years old son being attracted to Islamist militants.
69	Takva	A promotion brings a Muslim's relationship with God into question.
68	The Dove's Lost Necklace	The second part of Nacer Khemir's Desert Trilogy
67	The Hunting Party	A journalist and cameraman go to Bosnia to find the number one war criminal
66	The Tiger and the Snow	A love-struck Italian poet is stuck in Iraq at the onset of an American invasion.

65	Traitor	An FBI agent heads an investigation into an international conspiracy, all clues seem to lead back to former U.S. Special Operations officer, Samir Horn.
64	Waltz with Bashir	An Animated Israeli film director interviews fellow veterans of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon to reconstruct his own memoriesof the massacres in Sabra and Chatila camps.
63	Abouna	The lives of two brothers, who live in N'djamena, are upended when they awake one Saturday morning to find that their father has left the family...
62	Bombay	A Hindu man and a Muslim woman fall in love in a small village and move to Mumbai, where they have two children. However, growing religious tensions and erupting riots threaten to tear the family apart.
61	Charlie Wilsons War	A drama based on a Texas congressman Charlie Wilson's covert dealings in Afghanistan, where his efforts to assist rebels in their war with the Soviets have some unforeseen and long-reaching effects.
60	Dil Se	The clash between love and ideology is portrayed in this love story between a Hindu radio executive and a beautiful Muslim revolutionary, set in Kashmir.
59	Dirty Pretty Things	An illegal Nigerian immigrant discovers the unpalatable side of London life.
58	Islam, Empire of Faith	History of the Islamic Empire
57	Kandahar	An Afghan-born woman from Canada takes a perilous journey through Afghanistan to try to find her sister
56	Laal Salaam	Although not specifically about Muslims the film is about the "other" tribes and cultures who do not fit into mainstream India and their treatment by the authorities.
55	Lawrence of Arabia	An Epic film about T.E. Lawrence and how he along with the British government and Saud family fought against the Ottoman empire
54	Leila	A young couple face family pressure for the husband to take a second wife when they cannot have children.
53	Monsieur Ibrahim	In Paris, a Turkish shop owner befriends a Jewish boy in his mid-teens.
52	Moolaadé	When a woman shelters a group of girls from suffering female circumcision, she starts a conflict that tears her village apart.
51	Mr. and Mrs. Iyer	A bus journey set during riots in India where a Muslim journalist is rescued by a Hindu woman who pretends to be his wife
50	Rendition	An American wife searches for her Egyption husband who is kidnapped and tortured under the CIAs secret rendition program

49	Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves	When Robin and his Moorish companion come to England and the tyranny of the Sheriff of Nottingham, he decides to fight back as an outlaw.
48	Taxi To the Dark Side	In 2002, a cab driver picked up a few passengers near his home in Afghanistan. He never returned.
47	The Visitor	A college professor comes to the rescue of an Arab-Muslim who is detained by US. Immigration
46	The Yacoubian building	Based on the award-winning novel of the same name and covers a cast of characters in a building and touches upon themes of corruption, fundamentalism, prostitution, homosexuality, and drugs in central Cairo.
45	Times and Winds	A coming of age story in a mountain village in northwest Turkey as seen through the eyes of three children on the verge of adolescence.
44	Turtles can fly	Near the Iraqi-Turkish border on the eve of an American invasion, refugee children like 13-year-old Kak (Ebrahim), gauge and await their fate.
43	Umut (Hope)	Umut is the story of an illiterate poor man and his family who when he loses his only income goes on a quest for lost treasure
42	Valley of the Wolves	A Turkish action-adventure film set in northern Iraq during the American occupation. This has been a mega-hit in Turkey and Europe.
41	When we were Kings (doc)	An award winning documentary of the 1974 heavyweight championship bout in Zaire between champion George Foreman and underdog challenger Muhammad Ali.
40	Yol	Five Turkish prisoners are given a week's home leave, and we see its people and its authorities interweaved through their stories
39	Al-Ghazali the Alchemist of Happiness	A film about the philosopher Al-Ghazali and his parallels with our own times.
38	Bab' Aziz	The story of a blind dervish named Bab'Aziz and his spirited granddaughter, Ishtar.
37	Color of Paradise	A blind boy and his father struggle to co-exist in rural Iran
36	Decoding the Past - Secrets of the Koran (doc)	A wonderful documentary about the Quran which has shaped the Muslim faith and continues to influence the world.
35	Firaaq	Deals with the aftermath of Gujrat riots and effects on everyday people.
34	Inside Mecca (doc)	A National Geographic special following 3 Pilgrims from different parts of the world on a journey of their lifetimes.
33	Kingdom of Heaven	Balian of Ibelin travels to Jerusalem during the Crusades of the 12th century, and there he finds himself as the defender of the city and its people against Saladin

32	Le Grand Voyage	A young French-Moroccan man and his old father drive from the south of France to Mecca in a conflict-ridden humorous journey
31	Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet (doc)	Tells the story of the Prophet of Islam not only historically but how it unfolds, into the homes, mosques and workplaces of American-Muslims
30	Pitch Black: The Chronicles of Riddick	A group of marooned space travelers struggle for survival including an Imam
29	Rachida	A look at terrorism in Algeria through the eyes of Rachida, a teacher in one of the school districts.
28	Ramchand Pakistani	A young Hindu-Untouchable Pakistani boy and his father accidentally cross the border into India and languish in an Indian jail.
27	Salvation at 8:20	A dejected Iranian student comes under the influence of a self-righteous friend who wants to clean society of its ills in post-revolution Iran.
26	Slum Dog Millionaire	A Mumbai teen is arrested under suspicion of cheating and then terrorism, in a game show while his life history shows how he was able to come up with the right answers.
25	The Battle of Algiers	A film based on the bloodiest revolution in modern history, Alegria's war of independence from the French.
24	The Clay Bird	A film about religion and diversity in politically charged East Pakistan (now Bangladesh)
23	The Keeper: The Legend of Omar Khayyam	Kamran is a 12 year old boy in the present day who discovers that his ancestor is the 11th Century Mathematician, Astronomer, Poet of Persia, Omar Khayyam.
22	Blood and Oil (doc)	The film shows how oil has been at the core of American foreign policy for more than 60 years -- rendering our contemporary energy and military policies virtually indistinguishable.
21	Ceasefire	This comedy, whose Persian title is Atash Bas is a fast-paced comedy about a volatile marriage of a young couple and their attempt at reforming their childish and selfish ways.
20	Dor	Two young wives one Hindu and one Muslim share a common pain.
19	El Naser Salah el Dine (Saladin)	A story about the Kurdish Ruler Salahadin and his defeat of the Crusaders.
18	Indigènes (Days of Glory)	During WWII, four North African men enlist in the French army to liberate that country from Nazi oppression, and to fight French discrimination.
17	Mughal-e-Azam	Set in the 16th century AD, the movie brings to life the tale of the doomed love affair between the Mughal Crown Prince Saleem and the beautiful, ill-fated court dancer,

16	New Muslim Cool (doc)	Puerto Rican American rapper Hamza Pérez ended his life as a drug dealer and started down a new path as a young Muslim. This film follows his journey.
15	The 13th Warrior	The story of Ibn Fahdlan a refined Arab courtier, of the powerful Caliph of Baghdad, who encounters a band of Viking warriors on their journey to the barbaric North.
14	Fatih	An animated feature about Ottoman Ruler Mehmet II, who conquered Constantinople (modern day Istanbul)
13	Bagong Buwan	A film about the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao, Philippines and its effect on civilians.
12	Children of Heaven (Persian)	This Academy-Award nominated film is about a poor brother and sister in Iran who have to share one pair of shoes, and the troubles her brother goes to get her a pair.
11	Dreams of Dust	A Nigerian peasant comes looking for work in a dusty gold mine and seeks to redeem his past by giving all he works for to a widow and her daughter.
10	Lion of the Desert	A film about Omar Mukhtar, who fought against the Italian conquering of Libya in WW II
9	My Name is Khan	A film about a Muslim man whose name is Khan and his Hindu wife and how their life and relationship changes because of 9/11
8	Amreeka	The story about a Palestinian mother and her son as they journey for an exciting future to America
7	Babel	Tragedy strikes a married couple on vacation in the Moroccan desert, touching off an interlocking story involving four different families.
6	Baran	An Iranian boy falls in love with an Afghan refugee girl who has to become the breadwinner for her family.
5	Paradise Now	An Oscar-nominated film about two childhood friends who are recruited for a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.
4	Khuda Kay Liye (In the name of God)	Three interleaved stories based in the US, UK, and Pakistan and how they are impacted after 9/11
3	Syriana	A politically-charged epic about the state of the oil industry in the hands of those personally involved and affected by it.
2	Malcolm X	The life and times of controversial African-American civil rights leader who joined the Nation of Islam and then finally converted to Islam.
1	The Message	An epic film about the Story of the life of the Prophet of Islam, his message and challenges.

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